

Evan E. Lambert, '11
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
SpeakOut
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

[THOMAS R.]
BOSWORTH:

All right. My name is Thomas Bosworth. I'm interviewing Evan E. Lambert, Dartmouth Class of 2011, from the Ticknor Room at Rauner [Special Collections] Library in Hanover, New Hampshire, on Saturday, September 28th.

Evan, would you mind stating for the record where you're calling in from?

LAMBERT: I'm calling in from my apartment in Washington Heights, which is in Upper Manhattan in New York City.

BOSWORTH: Fantastic. So let's just go all the way back to where were you born?

LAMBERT: I was born in San Diego, California.

BOSWORTH: When was that?

LAMBERT: April 12th, 1989.

BOSWORTH: Did you spend much time in San Diego, was it?

LAMBERT: No—it was San Diego. I did not spend much time there. My parents were both in the [U.S.] Navy, so I was a Navy brat. And—sorry, I just ran into a chair.

BOSWORTH: [Chuckles.] No worries.

LAMBERT: And so part of being in the Navy is you frequently get sent on deployment, which means you get sent overseas or you have to change what base you work at, so we moved to Staten Island for a few years, in New York [City] and then eventually, when I was six, we moved to Virginia Beach, Virginia, because my mom had retired by then, but my dad was working on the naval base in Norfolk [Virginia]. And that is where I ended up staying. So he was able to work there

throughout the rest of my middle, high school, et cetera, experience.

BOSWORTH: Yeah. What was your early childhood like, then?

LAMBERT: Most of my memories start in Virginia, for sure. But I would say my early childhood was pretty good. I had a lot of freedom. I was an only child. So my mom made sure that I had a lot to entertain me, and she cared a lot about me.

She may have cared too much about me at certain points, being a little overprotective, especially when it came to my friends. Like, I had one friend who—she and I would—we were both very creative, and we'd spend a lot of time, like, writing short stories and acting them out. But my mom didn't like her mom, so I had to stop hanging out with her.

So I didn't have that creative outlet anymore. So, like, there were, like, sad stories, like, built into this, but, like, over all, my mom was very good to me and gave me a lot, and I was pretty happy for most of my early childhood.

BOSWORTH: What was it like growing in Virginia Beach?

LAMBERT: Well, by the time I realized I was attracted to men, which was probably when I was about, like, nine or ten, just right when I hit puberty, then it started becoming less ideal, because—I mean, at first I just got crushes on, like, my guy friends, who I spent all my time with. But once I parsed out the fact that they were not attracted to me as well, that was kind of sad.

But then, as I started to realize that was my identity and after hearing, like, the kids around me, like, make fun of gay men that they saw on TV or heard about or, like, using homophobic slurs, and also, like, my own parents had used slurs or spoken negatively about gay people, so once I saw all that, then I started to develop shame and, like, resigned myself to the fact that I would have to stay in the closet, like, forever.

So that was my outlook on life, and that was the burden I gave myself. And at that point, I really thought it was doable,

because I had youthful energy, and I just thought I could devote all of it to remaining in the closet.

BOSWORTH: So what—what made you choose Dartmouth, then?

LAMBERT: So, like I said, my mom was—I was her only child. She wanted to give me a lot, because she grew up very poor. Both my parents did. And her dad was an alcoholic, and her mom died when she was young, so she didn't have a lot of opportunity. She didn't have anyone looking out for her, so she wanted to give me the opposite experience.

So even though we didn't have money growing up—we were, like, lower middle class, I would say—she tried to give me as many opportunities as possible. And she had a plan for me. She wanted me to be a doctor. She wanted me to go to Harvard [University]. She had me in, like, a Harvard sweatshirt when I was four years old, playing with doctors, like kits—like that babies use to play with.

And even though, like, obviously, my parents couldn't afford something like that, she was just like, "We'll get you scholarships. Like, we'll help you," blah-blah-blah. That was the whole plan. So I had to work, like, super hard in middle school and high school to fulfill this plan of hers to be, like, the first person of our extended family to go to college, even, but also an Ivy League school.

So that is why I ended up at an Ivy League school. It was partly my mother's decision, and then at some point in high school it became my own, because at that point I had come out because this guy I had a crush on came out, and it made me come out to him, but then I got excited and told someone else, but it was the wrong person, and then suddenly everyone knew, and it just followed me to high school, and I had no choice in coming out. I was just out. Which kind of sucked because, like I said, Virginia is kind of homophobic.

And so that is how I ended up at Dartmouth, because I was applying to all these great schools, and I did not get into Harvard, which was absolutely devastating [chuckles], and I couldn't appreciate the fact that I still made it into a really great Ivy League school, Dartmouth, until much later. At that

point, I was just like, *Oh, God! I didn't get into Harvard. My life's over.* So that's how I picked Dartmouth.

BOSWORTH: Did your parents find out when you were outed in high school?

LAMBERT: They didn't find out right away. They didn't know a lot about my personal life. I kept a lot from them, because there was already that wall up between my mom and I, because she expected so much from me, and I was just trying to be that person that she wanted. That's such a cliché, with me, like, singing reflections from the lawn in the mirror and, like, wondering when my parents will ever see me for who I am inside or whatever.

But she—yeah, so there was that wall up, I didn't tell them a lot, but then my dad was kind of invasive. He doesn't have a sense of personal boundaries, so he, like, was snooping around in my e-mails. He somehow got in there, and he saw an e-mail that I wrote to someone about, like, a summer camp experience, and it talked explicitly about [chuckles] all the gay sex I had that summer, which was when I first had gay sex, was when I was seventeen.

And he showed it to my mom, and she freaked out, and she started—she, like, busted into my room at, like, nine a.m. This was a Sunday. She was, like, screaming at me. I'm, like, groggy and not even entirely sure what's going on. She's saying, like, "How could you?" And I honestly I blocked a lot of this from my memory because it was really traumatic.

But she was saying, like, "You're not the son that I—that I know and love. You need to get out of my house right now." So she basically, like, kicked me out of the house. And I, like, went to my friend's house for a day.

And then she, like, had a change of heart and started, like, calling me, like, twelve times [unintelligible]. And then she called the police. And then after that, I was, like, "Fine, I'll answer the calls if you'll call the police off. I don't want to be a fugitive before I even make it into college."

So she half apologized and basically just begged me to come back to the house. But then we never talked about

this. It was just incredibly awkward for six months. My dad and I didn't speak at all, even though my mom had dinners where we were all supposed to eat dinner every night, so he and I would just not talk, and my mom would talk to me and my mom would talk to him. And then we just never talked about this. And that was high school.

BOSWORTH: It sounds like a pretty extreme experience, coming—being outed to your parents. Were you able to find some distance at Dartmouth from that?

LAMBERT: Yes, absolutely. And I mentioned, like, some point in high school, like, going as far away as possible, specifically to Dartmouth, for example, became a goal of mine, and not just my mother's, and it was because of that. It was so I could get as far away from Virginia as possible cause it was such a negative experience in so many ways. And also I'm just, like, Type A [personality]. But, yeah. So getting to Dartmouth was, like, liberating. Yeah, for sure.

BOSWORTH: Yeah. What were some early experiences you had at Dartmouth?

LAMBERT: So before I even matriculated, I—I did, like, the 2007 version of Tinder for me, which was like going onto Facebook, using the filters that people used to use a lot to find every, like, Dartmouth student who was interested in men on Facebook. And then I “friended” all of them. I friended all the ones who I thought were attractive. That's why I mean, it was like the Tinder, like, swiping right, except just friending them.

Which is pretty awkward, looking back and I'm extremely embarrassed about that, and I would never do anything like that ever again. I would not tell anyone *to* do that. Not a great idea.

But I was just, like, so excited to be at a place where I could be myself and surrounded by, like-minded individuals, for the most part, and be in a culture that was more accepting towards queer people than the culture that had birthed me into the world.

So I did that. That actually led me to make friends with several queer men, and those friendships lasted throughout college, which was nice.

My roommate freshman year at East Wheelock [House]—he was gay. And the college actually paired us up because we both mentioned in our residential applications that we wanted to have, like, a gay-friendly roommate and that we were both gay, so they were overjoyed when they saw that we were both applying to East Wheelock, and put us together.

So, like, immediately I was surrounded by queer people and people that were accepting of queer people, so it was wonderful. But—and I also joined what was then called the [Dartmouth] Gay-Straight Alliance, and eventually became Gender Sexuality XYZ or GSX at some point during my four years there. And that introduced me to a lot of people that became very good friends of mine.

BOSWORTH: Great, great. I also noticed in the yearbook you were a member at The Tabard?

LAMBERT: That's right. Yeah, I—I heard of Tabard during my freshman year. I partied there a few times. I heard about their reputation and did not feel like part of mainstream Dartmouth culture. I did not feel like I wanted to go through a rush process. I didn't feel like I had a lot of common with many of the men who filled the core group of people who were going through that, because even though I was surrounded by all the queer positivity, when I stepped out of that circle, I realized, like, Dartmouth—there was a lot of, like, conservative attitudes still.

So when it was time for sophomore fall and everyone is rushing, I knew The Tabard was the place I wanted to be because it is an alternative environment, queer friendly, sex positive, drug friendly. At that point, I had started smoking weed [marijuana]. And—yeah, but it was, like, also, like, a party environment, which was important to me at that point in my life, because, like,—

I didn't really get into this part yet, but, like, as soon as I got to college and I was liberated, I started drinking a lot—like,

more than I should have been. And I know drinking is part of Dartmouth culture, and it was, like, socially acceptable to get shitfaced all the time, but, like, in my case, I went overboard, and it made me extremely depressed, and I started, like, doing poorly in classes. And I—I mean, I have a lot of distance between me then and me now, and I can—I can look back and analyze the feelings that I was experiencing and the factors that were going into this, and I can say it was partly just the fact that alcoholism runs in my family. Like I mentioned, my grandfather was alcoholic, and two uncles are—two are alcoholics.

It was also because I was reacting to all the pressure that had been on me, not only to succeed, to become a doctor, to go to an Ivy League school, but also, like, because I spent a lot of time in the closet and because I spent a lot of time trying to be the person that my mother wanted me to be—this was—all this pressure, and suddenly, like, drinking was an outlet to avoid all of those—all that pressure, all that responsibility that was hanging over my head.

And finally it all—I crumpled under all the pressure and just turned to drinking because that was the easiest way to cope with the fact that I was suddenly failing at things. I—well, I didn't failing anything my freshman year, but I wasn't doing well. I got a D in one of my classes. So I became, like, super depressed.

And all this led me to Tabard because—well, because of all the good things I said but also because it gave me another outlet for drinking. So this is—yeah, there we are.

BOSWORTH: Did you find that many of your queer friends had a similar experience?

LAMBERT: I think it was—not many of them. I don't think all my friends were alcoholics, which was great for them. There were—I'd say my queer friends at Tabard were—definitely had substance abuse problems. That was—Tabard is a great place. There's so much love there, so much support, but it's also an enabling environment, and a lot of people there do have substance abuse issues. And it's not talked about frequently, because in college, abusing substances makes you cool in a lot of circles.

So I'd say my friends there were, but I was still in contact with students in the Gay-Straight Alliance, and those students were more academic. They spent less time partying. Many of them had more privileges than myself growing up, so they—they had less to escape from, and they were able to—they were in a better situa- —how can I describe that? They were in a better position to, like, explore their passions. Like, they—they didn't—they didn't—

Like me—oh, my God, I'm starting to not be articulate all of a sudden. [Chuckles.]

BOSWORTH: That's all right.

LAMBERT: They—they weren't, like, flailing as much as myself, but—that's the better—that's what I'm trying to say, I guess.

And my friend, Cody [T.] Lavender [Class of 2010]—he was a leader in that group of students. And I didn't even realize this until my junior year, but apparently he had been suffering from depression, a great amount of depression, and I'm mentioning him because I would say he's the exception to the rule of what I just described, of, like, people who were very, like, active in GSA, GSX, who were, like, activists on campus, who were actually trying to, like, improve the lives of the queer people around them.

He did not fit into that mold of, like, more privileged or, like, more likely to have a positive experience at Dartmouth. I thought he was, but he was really good at hiding the fact that he was miserable. And then he actually ended up killing himself my—oh, I don't remember—my junior year, while he was on a study abroad program. He jumped off the balcony of the—the building he was staying in.

And so that was really—really hard for the queer community, since he was a leader. He had even, like, organized one of the first, like, pride marches in Edinburgh, Scotland, where he was studying abroad, and he was very vocal on campus, and he cared a lot about his fellow students and, like, Dartmouth culture and improving Dartmouth culture. So it's really shocking to find out that he had been depressed and also just really heartbreaking that he passed away.

But—how did I get into that? I was—oh, drawing a line between Tabard and GSA, trying to describe the differences between the two communities.

And then I guess in comparison, there are also, like, queer students at Dartmouth who had come from privilege or had more privilege, like, relative to me, who were not as interested in being friends with mostly queer people or being involved with the queer community and queer activism, who were able to, like, integrate into mainstream Dartmouth culture, like joining frats because maybe they were, like, more masculine presenting or, like, had more money, so they had that, like, social capital that comes with being from a good family or having connections, whatever.

And those were—there was—there was a handful—there was a handful of student who were like that, who were, like, visibly queer—like, everyone knew who they were because they were very, like, charming, but they had, like, successfully integrated into mainstream culture at Dartmouth.

And I envied them a little bit, because I had not. [Chuckles.] Yeah, I was still finding myself. I still felt uncomfortable in my own skin when I was at Dartmouth. It wasn't until after I graduated, I would say, that I—that I finally started exploring my real passions, growing, becoming more confident in my own abilities, becoming more confident in the path I was choosing for myself.

And I honestly would attribute a lot of this feeling of being lost to the drinking problem that I had while I was at Dartmouth.

BOSWORTH: Yeah, there are a lot of threads I want to follow there, but how did Cody Lavender's death affect you after that happened?

LAMBERT: Yeah. Well, I mean, just on a personal level, like, he was a friend of mine. He was a good friend. He was a very caring person, and a lot of people looked up to him, including myself, because he had a lot of wisdom for such a young person. He had made me feel better about myself a lot. He

had a real—he had a real grasp on the underpinnings of class and sexuality at Dartmouth, how they affecting people’s relationships to each other. And so he was able to look on that objectively and see what was happening at Dartmouth and explain it in ways that made sense to his friends and make us not feel so bad when those—when those clashes of sexuality and class affected us.

So, yeah, he had all the makings of a great leader, and that came out a lot in his friendships, like I said, because he was he would tell us these things, and we would look up to him as a mentor.

So, yeah, it was just sad to lose a fr- — I wasn’t, like, especially close to him at that point, just because of the D-Plan. Like, I hadn’t seen him in, like, over six months. But he had always been a friend and a mentor. And it was also sad to lose that kind of leader of the queer community when we didn’t really have much of that at Dartmouth, when a lot of people didn’t feel like there was such a need to engage in queer activism, because like I said, there were so many queer students who were integrating.

BOSWORTH: Were you able to find support in the GSA community after that, or—

LAMBERT: Yes. After he died, we had a—we had an entire meeting at GSX that was devoted to all of Cody’s friends, like, sharing the memories of him, which was really nice, kind of cathartic, kind of healing. And even people who didn’t know him came there and got to hear these stories. And so it was a memorial for him.

And then there was a more, like, formal memorial service, where even more people came, and you could see, like, all the lives he had touched. So there was absolutely support among the core queer people at Dartmouth, who—who had always, like, been tight-knit.

BOSWORTH: Do you remember what the college’s official response was like?

LAMBERT: It wasn’t much different from responses to when other students have died while at Dartmouth or shortly before or

after. I do remember there was a lot of mention of his sexual orientation or his, like, queer activism, maybe, like, a sentence or two, but in my opinion that was a huge part of his identity.

BOSWORTH: You mentioned much earlier that having a creative outlet was important to you. Were you able to turn to that at this time?

LAMBERT: Yes. Not specifically then, after Cody died, but Dartmouth was where I really started to explore that part of me again after tucking it away for so long. [Chuckles.] I've been, like, shitting on my Dartmouth experience so much, but there are definitely good things that have followed me throughout the rest of my life.

Oh, my God, I'm sorry. Is it bad that I just cursed? I didn't really think about that.

BOSWORTH: No, that's totally fine.

LAMBERT: Okay. Yeah. So while I was at Dartmouth, I—I started writing for several publications: *The Dartmouth Independent*, [The] *Dartmouth Free Press*, and *The Dartmouth*, the oldest college newspaper in the country, which, of course, you know that, but I just say that because I can't think of them without thinking it.

But, yeah, and I wrote a column for them called "BOOKED SOLID." It was a column about literature: fiction, nonfiction, memoirs, whatever. And it was less of a, like, a review column than it was for me to talk about whatever I wanted. Apparently, I had fans. They never came up to me while I was eating at Collis, so I'm not sure if they exist, but my editors told me they did.

And so that—I—that was actually an outlet for, like, creative nonfiction writing. And then, like I mentioned, I took creative writing classes and ended up, like, minoring in English after I gave up on the whole doctor thing.

And, yeah, so once I started exploring that and being, like, *Wow! Like I have a knack for writing. I really love writing. I love being creative. Why did I stop doing this? That was*

really stupid. And so that's when I started pursuing that, and I ended up, like, going to, like, journalism school after a year before deciding I didn't want to do journalism; I really wanted to be a writer, which, as I just mentioned, I realized while I was at Dartmouth. I just didn't want to admit it to myself, and ended up following a writing career.

BOSWORTH: You made the switch to studying more creative writing, English-focused things in junior or senior year?

LAMBERT: Junior year is when I—I started—I made the decision to minor in English. It was also when I officially—oh, end of sophomore year was when actually decided to major in anthropology, but it was junior year also when I completely stopped premed stuff. I just gave up on that. [Chuckles.] Even after doing organic chemistry, both of them. And physics, oh my god I hated physics. I hated organic chemistry too.

Yeah. What was your question? Did I answer it? I forgot.

BOSWORTH: Yeah, you did. Was that—

LAMBERT: Okay, good.

BOSWORTH: Was it relieving to make the switch, or stressful?

LAMBERT: Definitely relieving. At that point, like, my mom realized I was going through a tough time, and she just wanted me to be happy. And so she was obviously a little disappointed that I didn't want to be a doctor, but ultimately she was okay with this. I mean, she already found out I was gay [chuckles], so finding out I didn't want to be a doctor was a little easier to take at that point. She had grown accustomed to me making decisions that veered away from her plan for me.

So yeah, it was definitely a relief. I got that off my chest. I was finally able to take classes that I cared about. I mean, there was still the issue of drinking and depression, which affected my studies still, but at least I wasn't in classes that, like, made me miserable. Yeah.

BOSWORTH: Did you find that your relationship with your parents improved in college?

LAMBERT: Yes. My relationship with my mom improved a lot. We're both kind of closed-off people—I mean, because we both had shitty experiences during our formative years, which is part of why we never really, like, talked about, like, this big emotional confrontation that affected both of our lives, which happened when I was seventeen, by the—oh, yeah, I already mentioned that.

But in college, like, as she saw me dealing with alcoholism and as she saw that my grades weren't doing so well and as she saw that I was changing, in some ways negative, in some ways positive—like, I don't know what she was going through, because we didn't talk too much about emotional issues, but something was going through her mind that made her want to be more accepting of my choices and to show that she was more accepting of my choices.

So she would listen more when I would talk about things I was passionate about, such as writing for *The Dartmouth* or taking an English class. I mean, she'd still say, like, "But you're still studying for organic chemistry, right?" You know, but at least, like, she wasn't pooh-poohing my idea of pursuing these other subjects.

And at this point also, I had found out that my uncle, her brother, had been gay, and they—he had died of AIDS [acquired immunodeficiency syndrome] when I was four, but they had been incredibly close. And she had seen, like, his life as a gay man. She had met his lover. She had met his gay friends. So she had been exposed to the culture and had been tolerant of it.

And so it was through this that I realized—I mean, she would never say, like,—as I said, we did not talk about our feelings, but it was through learning that from my other family members and then hearing her tell me about him and start to open up about her experiences of being close to him—it was through this that I realized that her reaction to me coming out wasn't necessarily based on homophobia. It was coming from a place of pain because she had kind of sensed that I was gay. I had hinted at it a lot, apparently. And she didn't want me to have the life he did.

She didn't want me to die, basically. She didn't want me to get AIDS. She saw that happened to him, and it was incredibly difficult for her. And he faced a lot of obstacles, too, in his adult life, where a straight person would have been able to pur- —to go further in their career, he would hit roadblocks. So she just wanted me to have a better life. And so it was difficult for her to grapple with the fact that I was turning out to be gay as well.

So, like I said, she started opening up more about her relationship with her brother, and she would do little things, like ask me if I was seeing anyone and—instead of asking if I had a girlfriend, she would ask if I was seeing anyone. So this was her way of showing that she was becoming more accepting, without us really talking about it.

I think the biggest turning point, though, may have been my junior winter. This was when I was my most depressed in Dartmouth, and I ended up overdosing on sleeping pills. And so I had to go the hospital, and my parents got an ambulance charge out of the blue, that I didn't warn them about, and so they had to call me up, asking for an explanation.

And I was in Dick's House for a week, on suicide watch. And this was the first time that my dad acknowledged the fact that I was gay. He did it in the most roundabout way, and it took a suicide attempt for him to see, like, how much all of this shit I was going through had affected me.

But on the phone, after, like, finding out everything that was going on with me, he said, "Did you do this because you think you're gay?" And part of me was relieved she [sic] was finally admitting it. The other part of me was, like, angry that he wasn't really admitting it and he was saying that—he was implying it was, like, a phase or just something on my mind.

So I—I got annoyed, and I was, like, "What do you mean that I think I'm gay?" He was like, "That you know you're gay. Whatever." [Chuckles.] And so then I got him to, like, say it, but also we were both really pissed at each other, which has been a trend. We've had lots of confrontations. Like, a couple of physical ones in high school.

But, yeah, so that was really the turning point. And then after that, both of my parents were more demonstrative of their love for me and their acceptance of me. It just took that really painful time to do it.

BOSWORTH: Did your depression start to ease at that point, after the junior winter?

LAMBERT: It did. It—it definitely did. I have never tried to kill myself again. And it's just gotten gradually better ever since then, as my relationship with my parents has healed, to the point where we just both love each other, we're both open with each other as much as parents and kids can be with each other.

And I was able to find more enjoyment in my studies. I mean, I still had a drinking problem. Don't get me wrong. That made it hard for me to, like, find the focus I needed to really excel as a student and really, like, put all my energy into the passions that I'm now following. But I was absolutely on the right path, and my depression has never been, like, that bad ever again, which is such a blessing.

BOSWORTH: For sure. What was your senior year like?

LAMBERT: Senior year, I was living at Tabard. I was in the maid's room, which is [chuckles]—for someone with a drinking problem probably not the best idea because it was literally down the hall from the—the basement, the Pong room. But I had a roommate the first term, Catherine Saber [spelling unconfirmed], a straight woman. Her parents were both, like, Christian missionaries. We came from very different backgrounds, but we got along really well.

And then the rest of the year, she—she was—her D-Plan took her away from campus, so I had the room to myself. Yeah, I was living in Tabard, so I was spending, like, almost all my time at Tabard at that point. And I was working on an anthropology thesis, partly because I was interested in it, partly because it meant I got out of taking three classes [chuckles] that year.

And I started pursuing it junior year, and it was a study on queer people—LGBT people in the military. And this is while

“Don’t ask, don’t tell” was still—it was before it had been repealed. So I was, like, interviewing service members whose identities had to remain anonymous so that they couldn’t be dishonorably discharged from the military, because you could still have that happen to you if your higher-ups thought you’re a queer.

And so I was interviewing them, just, like, getting a feel for what it was like to be queer in the military and piecing together a portrait of the subculture of closeted service members.

And then luckily, amazing, miraculously, while I was pursuing this study, “Don’t ask, don’t tell” was repealed. So I was able to study the subculture of closeted members and study service member—study the subculture of service members after it had been repealed, after they could be openly queer, to compare the two. It made for quite an interesting study. Got a lot of attention from the department and gave me an opportunity to write a kickass thesis.

And I approached my thesis like, less academically than most people. It was more about writing about the experience of it that I enjoyed the most—like, sharing the stories of these service members, presenting them in an interesting way. Of course, also doing research, including, like, the data that I found in ways that are acceptable amongst anthropology academics.

But I enjoyed that. But I was still kinda happy to—to get out of Dartmouth by the end of it—I was ready to get out of there.

BOSWORTH: Yeah. What did you do right after Dartmouth?

LAMBERT: After Dartmouth, I went to Columbia University for journalism school. I wanted to—I mostly just wanted to give myself a year to figure things out. And in retrospect, going to a year of grad school is not the best way to do that, because it’s freaking expensive, and I’m still paying off my student loan. Probably will be for quite a while.

And also, like I mentioned, at Dartmouth I was getting the sense that writing was what I wanted to pursue, and I hadn’t

fully accepted that when I went to journalism school, because obviously, at journalism school the focus is not as much on the writing as it is on the—on the reporting, on the art of journalism. Pounding the pavement, building connections, finding sources, doing research, collecting data, that sort of thing. I wasn't as passionate about that and realized that almost right away in journalism school.

But journalism school helped me get an internship at *Out* magazine, and that was halfway through the year, and I loved that. That was my entrée into a career of writing, because I wasn't doing any journalism for them; I was blogging for them. I was writing in my own voice, just, like, doing aggregate news, writing about events, like, from my own perspective.

So I absolutely loved that. That was—that was the moment when I really found my footing as an adult, I would say, because that was when I fell in love with a career that I could pursue and that I was good at.

BOSWORTH: How long did you write for *Out* magazine?

LAMBERT: My internship with them lasted about six months, and—but I continued to freelance for them for a year and a half, because after—after interning with them, I interned at *People* magazine for three months. That was also cool. That was cool as an experience. I didn't get to do a lot of writing in—in the way that I like to do. There was a lot of reporting involved. I spent an entire afternoon, like, waiting outside Katie Holmes' apartment, like, during a tornado warning just so I could, like, see if she had her baby with her.

I also had to stalk her at the zoo. This was the summer that she divorced Tom Cruise, so she was, like, major news. And *People* magazine sent me to stalk her at Central Park Zoo, and I had to, like,—there was no—there were no guidelines they gave me; they just said, "Follow her. Write down what she's doing at all times."

So I, like, went into the penguin exhibit and pretended to be taking pictures of the penguins, but I was actually, like, typing notes into my phone while staring at her and her child [chuckles] like a creep. And then her bodyguard, like, came

over at one point and inquired as to what I was doing, and I was, like, “Oh, I’m writing a poem about the penguins.” And they got off my case.

That’s a tangent, that’s an aside. Sorry.

But, yeah, so I was working at *People* magazine, and then at the end of that internship, I, like, didn’t have anything lined up because I was still just, like, getting hammered all the time and, like, didn’t, like, care enough about my future yet. Even though I had found a career I liked, I still was not very responsible about myself and my choices, so I never lined up anything, like an apartment or anything. And I was just, like, *Well, I guess all I can do is go back to Virginia, because I don’t have to pay for rent.* It’s a very immature thing to do. It’s regressing in many ways. But I moved back to my parents’ house for some time.

And then started, like, regrowth. I quit drinking. I found actual, like, writing jobs that were full time. Like, I started working as a copywriter down there, and I got to write creatively for a living, which was great.

I started exploring other creative outlets. Like, I started doing improv and got really involved with theater. I auditioned for things. I got roles. I directed a show. I wrote a play. I was doing all these things that made me really happy that I had never explored before. And I was finally getting a sense of, like, who I was and what made me tick.

And I had to—I was in Virginia again, which wasn’t great. I mean, it was a lot better than when I was growing up, but it was still, like, a little—there’s still homophobia, just not as overt. And there are a lot more, like, accepting people there, and it was much easier to be openly queer.

But yeah, so that’s what was going on down there.

BOSWORTH: So how did that prepare you for what you’re doing now? it sounds pretty connected.

LAMBERT: It is. I wasn’t sure, like, how much further you wanted to go ahead. Yeah, so, well, that’s where I, like, reconnected with the creative part of me that I hadn’t—that I had kind of

tucked away throughout middle school and high school, so that I could pursue being a doctor. And I was realizing how happy that was making me. I was starting to just write all the time as my job, on the side. That was giving me more opportunities. Like, I was—I was getting more, like, part-time jobs, more contract jobs at places like Mic, places like Ranker. Those were probably the two big ones at that point.

So I was, like, able to support myself as a writer, which was awesome. And finally, a lot of, like, negative things came to head in Virginia that made me want to get out of there. Like, the owner of the comedy theater I was writing and performing at—he was—he was super homophobic. Like, literally called me a faggot, like, on three different occasions. And this, mind you, is, like, right around the time gay marriage is being legalized across the country. This wasn't, like, the nineties. This isn't like, the early 2000s. This was, like, when it's, like unacceptable. And everyone realizes that.

And, like, I didn't have any support from other people in the community, even though, like, people were, like, generally accepting. People were also, like, more supportive of him because he was, like, the leader of that community. So people didn't have my back when I tried to stand up to him.

And so when he started, like, shutting me out from things and even told me, like, not to come to theater at some point for, like, two weeks because I told him not to call me a faggot, like, people didn't have my backs [sic] there.

So I was, like, starting to notice, like, even though, like, Virginia on the surface seemed a lot better, there was still a lot of issues that were bubbling to the surface. And, like, ultimately I could never be totally happy there without major change, and I did not have the energy to make that change myself, and that burden shouldn't be on me anyway.

And also I was living with a closeted Mormon guy. This just keeps getting better. He—he and I were basically dating. We were in a relationship. But he wasn't out, so we—I couldn't—we couldn't be, like, public about, like, how I felt for each other, which was really difficult. Like, to everyone else, he was straight. Even had a girlfriend at one point while we were living together.

Of course, my friends knew of what was going on, but then other people, like, wouldn't believe me because he said he was straight. So that was cool, feeling like everyone thought I was a liar. Yeah, so that just started getting miserable, that coupled with all the comedy theater drama.

So all of this was making me confront the fact that I couldn't be entirely happy in Virginia, and I was also realizing there were just a lot more creative opportunities elsewhere, especially in big cities such as New York. So I just—I just made a complete break. I—I didn't even quit my job. I just stopped going to my job.

I was, like, on a—copywriter at the Norfolk Botanical Garden. I hated that job, by the way. The—the CEO was—he was openly gay, but he sexually harassed me. He came into my office and, like, hit on me and made me very uncomfortable. So I just stopped going to that job. I stopped going to the comedy theater. I still stayed in touch with, like, my best friends there, of course.

And then one day I just, like, moved all my stuff out of Garney [spelling unconfirmed] apartment. Garney was the Mormon guy. And then I just went up to New York. I contacted my friend from Dartmouth, from Tabard. I told her I—I asked if I could stay with her as I looked for a job, as I found a place. She said okay, so I did the whole romantic thing, where I just—I had fifty dollars in my bank account, so I just got a bus ticket and brought up two suitcases, slept on her floor and started getting my shit together up here, in a place where I could be much happier.

And so that is how I ended up in New York. I almost immediately got, like, a full-time creative writing job, which was awesome, for a blog based out of L.A. [Los Angeles, California]. It wasn't, like, a super successful blog, but I didn't care because I got to write every day and support myself. I got a salary.

And I started pursuing improv up here, which is no homophobic people, which is awesome. Yeah, it's just been so much better. It's been such a journey, and it was difficult

establishing a new life for me after making such a, like, sudden break with Virginia, but I'm a lot happier.

BOSWORTH: Sounds fantastic. Has your perception of Dartmouth changed much in the meantime?

LAMBERT: Yes. Because—I mean, we're getting into the nitty-gritty of it and getting into the details, which are unsavory at times, depressing at others, but because I've had so much distance from Dartmouth—well, not physical. I go back a lot because I still have a lot of friends from Dartmouth. And I—I go back for LGBTQ, the DGALA [Dartmouth Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Alumni/ae Association, or Dartmouth LGBTQIA+Alum Association] events.

But because I've had emotional distance from it, because I'm not, like,—I'm not in that culture, I'm trying to—trying to thrive, trying to succeed within that culture, I'm able to look at it more objectively. So, like, yes, there were a lot of negative experiences that affect who I am today, but I'm also able to see all the positive experiences, which I've also mentioned to you. They just aren't as interesting. [Chuckles.]

But, yeah. And so I'm able to—I'm also able to see, like, maybe that wasn't the right school for me. I probably should have been somewhere just slightly less conservative so that I might have had an easier time integrating into campus, making even more friends outside of my queer group and the—the few circles that I branched out from that into.

Maybe a school less focused on drinking, on partying. Maybe a school without a Greek culture. These are all things that I look back and realize I should have done, gone to a school without those.

But I'm also, like, grateful— I'm grateful for the negative experiences too, because they—they caused me to look at my life, look at my choices, like sassy gay friends have. And realized why I wasn't happy and become more introspective, and to try to figure out what I wanted out of life.

And, I mean, at any college you can explore things like that, but because there were these subcultures at Dartmouth where I was able to find my people, there was still, like,

support for me, so I didn't feel, like, completely alone, even as I was flailing. And I felt comfortable enough to question myself about these things, to try and find answers.

And I was surrounded by people who were frequently flailing just as much as I was, going through a lot of the same issues, but were still wanting to survive and wanting to answer these questions for themselves.

So maybe I wasn't, like, the kind of student who would thrive at Dartmouth, in the mainstream of Dartmouth, but Dartmouth was such a—it had such a diverse student body, it had so many different strains of intellectualism, strains of subcultures that I was still able to find really great things, really great people that impacted my life.

BOSWORTH: Wow. Yeah. I'm so grateful we got to talk today. Is there anything else you wanted to talk about on the record, or—

LAMBERT: Oh, my gosh! I didn't realize you were going to get into my entire life story. That was very cathartic.

BOSWORTH: [Chuckles.]

LAMBERT: [Chuckles.] No, I can't think of anything. I mean, if I do think of anything, should I, like, e-mail you or something?

BOSWORTH: Yeah, sure.

LAMBERT: Okay. But yeah, no, we talked about a lot. I think that just about covers the main stuff.

BOSWORTH: Fantastic. I'll end the recording, then.

[End of interview.]